



CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS EURASIA ECONOMIC INTEGRATION: ONE BELT ONE ROAD PROJECT

La política exterior china hacia la integración económica de Eurasia: el proyecto Un cinturón, una ruta

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During the period from 2005 to 2015 under the rule of Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping, China has achieved enormous success not only in the field of economy but also in the political and diplomatic areas. With the Silk Road Economic Belt's initiative launched by the government of Xi in 2013, China was seeking to find alternatives for different affairs such as the South China Sea, the nuclear issue of North Korea, and Taiwan issues. The emergency of the "Strategic Breakthrough" whose aim is to stabilize the surrounding atmosphere makes it a pressing task for the Chinese diplomacy focused on Eurasia to overhaul the international order.



Abstract

Durante la década 2005 - 2015 bajo el mandato de los presidentes de Hu Jintao y de Xi Jinping, China ha logrado un enorme éxito no solo en el ámbito económico sino también en el desarrollo político y diplomático. Con la nueva iniciativa del Cinturón Económico de la Ruta de la Seda propuesta por el Gobierno de Xi en 2013, China ha pretendido encontrar una alternativa especialmente en los asuntos del Mar de la China Meridional, la cuestión nuclear de Corea Norte y la cuestión de Taiwán. La emergencia de la "brecha estratégica" que tiene como fin estabilizar la atmósfera circundante, hace que se convierta en una tarea apremiante para la diplomacia china centrada en Eurasia con el objetivo de revisar el orden internacional.



Resumen

China foreign policy; Eurasia integration; Silk Road and Economic Belt; diplomacy.

Política exterior de China; integración Eurasia; Ruta de la Seda; diplomacia.



Key words

Recibido: 19-11-2019. Aceptado: 28-06-2021



Fechas

1. Introduction

In 2013 Chinese President Xi Jinping talked for the first time about the construction of a joint Economic Belt of Silk Road¹ in Nazarbayev University during an official visit to Kazakhstan. Since then, the One Belt One Road (Chinese: 一带一路) has represented China's great strategy across the Eurasian continent, geographically speaking, with the goal of achieving economic cooperation with those countries situated along the Road. The Silk Road Economic Belt, connected with the Yangtze River Synergetic Development Economic Belt around Beijing, is based on three main strategies to push regional economic integration instead of the old strategies previously used².

China categorized the Eurasia region as the second- largest group of countries behind Russia in terms of regional power, however, the economic and political influences of this block cannot be compared with those of Russia's. Moreover, China has also been involved in affairs of South Asia and Pacific Ocean in recent years.

The background of the Silk Road Economic Belt project is based on the ancient Chinese Silk Road that embodies both a rich historical heritage and the success of this ancient strategy. This strategy shows the Chinese president's ambition for a "Chinese Dream" (Chinese: 中国梦) but also of the "National Rejuvenation" (Chinese: 民族复兴). Moreover, with the different models of cooperation established through the Platform of One Belt One Road, The Chinese government is finding different solutions to several domestic social problems.

Image 1. The Maritime Silk Road of 21 Century



Source: <https://www.lifeofguangzhou.com/wap/findServices/content.do?contextId=7375&frontParentCatalogId=196>

1 Translation from Chinese 絲綢之路 (Si Chou Zhi Lu).

2 The three strategies are proposed successively by Chinese government during 2013 and 2014, all of which are regional economic developmental policies. Economic Belt of Yangtze River strategy considers the economic development of cities along with the Yangtze river taking advantage of the aquatic transportation and the Synergetic Development policy concentrates zones around the capital city-Beijing so that the population and transport pressures of the capital could be released gradually.

This paper consists of three parts. Firstly, it will analyze the background of the strategy from the Chinese point of view. Then, it will study the patterns of cooperation of the One Road One Belt strategy based on the research of both Chinese and foreign academic work. Finally, it will investigate the impact for China and Eurasia from a global perspective. The paper also aims to provide valuable information for further investigation on the matter as many papers have been published only in Chinese.

2. The Silk Road in ancient times

First of all, before analyzing the Silk Road Economic Belt and Eurasia integration it is crucial to fully understand basic concepts before taking further steps. As mentioned before, the term of the Silk Road Economic Belt was firstly announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013 during his state visit to Kazakhstan and later in 2015, it was officially included in the official document of *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road*.³ Based on the official document, a multi-dimensional vision is needed to describe the Silk Road Economic Belt.

First of all, the name of *Silk Road* was given by the German geographer Ferdinand von Rochthofen in 1877 and it can be historically dated back to Han Dynasty (206 B.C-220 A.C) when ancient China was in boom (Li, 2014). Therefore, the concept of “*Silk Road Economic Belt*” is now used with a new meaning to symbolize the economic approach and commercial cooperation between East and West.

Among the many works that study the routes of the Ancient Silk Road from different points of view, the Chinese pieces of work provide more comprehensive details about the creation and expansion of the Silk Road Routes. According to the famous Chinese archaeologist Xu Pingfang⁴, historically the Silk Road was made up of four routes, three of them by land plus one sea route. (Pingfang, 2007).

Specifically, the first one is called the *North Grassland Silk Road* due to its geographical position, in the North of China and connected to Mongolia. Those who were living in this region of grassland were nomadic hordes, meaning that they did not have fixed homes but moved across different regions to secure their food supply. Hence, this road also worked as cultural diffusion pipeline although this wasn't one its main goals. The migration of these hordes in the northern areas from the 10th century B.C. until 3rd century B.C. led to the diffusion of the Chinese silk from the Chinese Great Khingan to the Black Sea. Both Liao Dynasty (916 A. C. – 1125 A. C.) and Yuan Dynasty (1271 A. C. – 1368 A. C.) took full control of the new conquered areas and made efforts to integrate the local hordes both culturally and economically. China exported its silk and other textile products through China's Western Region (called Xi Yu, currently Xin Jiang area) and Central Asia. The Yuan Dynasty also built routes connecting the North of Siberia to Central Asia.

The name of Silk Road was given by the German geographer Ferdinand von Rochthofen in 1877 and it can be historically dated back to Han Dynasty

3 In 28th of March, 2015 Chinese National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Commerce issued this governmental document in Chinese and English in which gave fully an explanation about the background, steps and Chinese activities of building the Economic Belt of Silk Road. To see the English version in the official website of National Development and Reform Commission (PRC): http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html

4 Xu Pingfang (1930.10-2011.05), as Chinese name 徐萍芳, was the archeologic researcher of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute. See one of his articles The Silk Road of within Chinese territory translated from his publication.

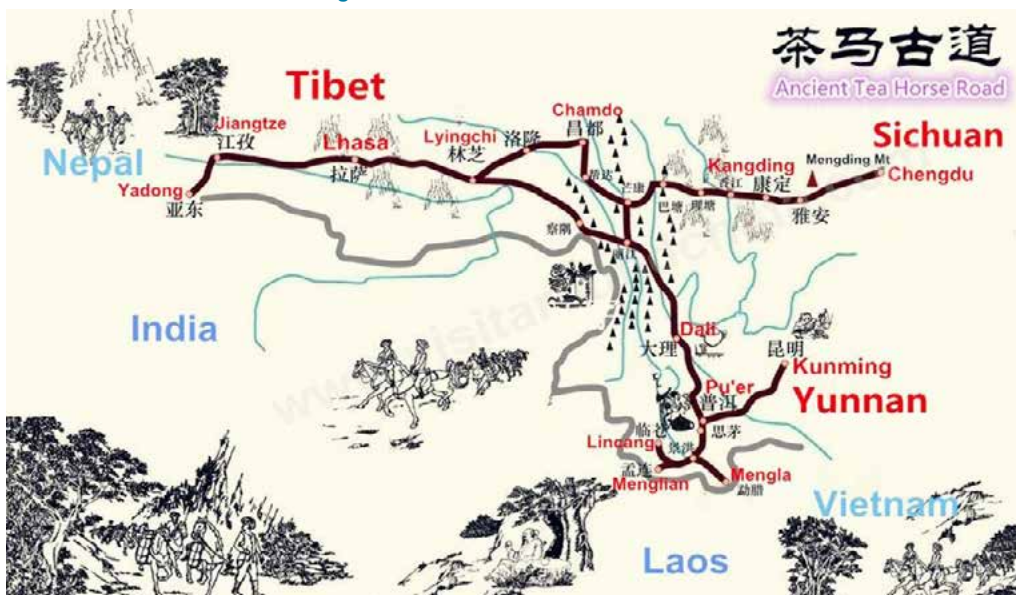
Image 2. North Grassland Silk Road in Ancient Times of China



Source: edited based on the image from Chinese National Geography <http://www.dili360.com/cng/article/p5350c3d-7b2a9838.htm>

The second silk road comprises the area across China’s Southwest area called the *Ancient Tea Horse Road*. According to historical records, an envoy of the Western Han Dynasty (202 B. C. – 8 B. C.) named Zhang Qian was dispatched to visit the Chinese Western area but eventually ended his trip in Afghanistan where he noticed that there were Chinese textile products in local markets. During the Western Han Dynasty, control of the Southwestern area was strengthened by the establishment of local officers and outposts to improve connections to the frontier of Yunnan-Vietnam. Until the Tang Dynasty (618 A. C. – 907 A. C.), according to archeological discoveries religious and cultural influences were remarkable, The religious envoy of the Tang Dynasty visited the Southwestern area travelling throughout the similar route from Qinghai to Tibet, then on to Katmandu in Nepal.

Image 3. Ancient Tea Horse Road of China



Source: <https://www.pinterest.nz/pin/336221928422152210/>

The third silk road is a sea-route made possible by the technological development of ship-building and navigation since the Western Han dynasty, according to the historical records of Chinese *Han Shu*. During the Tang Dynasty (618 A. C. – 907 A. C.) this route expanded from the port of Guangzhou in the South of China to areas of Southeast Asia based on the trade of silk. Moreover, the route kept spreading through the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea eventually reaching the Persian Gulf. Later on, under the Ming Dynasty (1368 B. C. – 1644 B. C.) the emperor sent envoy Zheng He to travel to the West seven times, something similar to Columbus's journeys. Countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, India, Iran and Kenya were visited by Zhen He at that time.

Image 4. The Route of Ancient Maritime Silk Road



Source: <https://www.bunkerist.com/en/?p=31816>

The last route, which was called *route of desert*, constitutes the new Silk Road as we know it today, starting from Chang'an (today Xi'an) to Gansu-Hexi Corridor to Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, on to Central and West Asia and eventually arriving to Europe. Back then, there was an alternative road that included both Northern and Southern sub-courses. The former route began from the Siberian Plateau, headed westward from the Mongolian Plateau and passed the Aral Sea, Caspian Sea and Black Sea to reach East Europe. The latter initiated in China's Northeast coast and followed the Northern foot of the Tianshan Mountains to reach Central and West Asia and finally arrive to East Europe. Finally, the last one was the Southwest route from Chengdu to Yunnan Province and on to Burma, India and Pakistan and Central Asia (Li, 2014, pp. 34-39).

Geographically, the new Road runs across Eurasia along the vast majority of hinterland countries, which connect, on the one side, the East-Asian economic area and, on the other side, the well-developed European economic area. Moreover, the Road clears the route China to Central-Asia, from Russia to Europe (the Baltic), as well as the route from China to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea through Central-Asia and South-Asia. The route has seven thousand kilometers in length and goes through several Eurasian countries in which over three billion people live today. More specifically, the government of Xi has planned the Silk Road to run through the Northern and the Southern corridors: the Northern based on the Eurasian Continental Bridge connecting China-Russia-Mongolia; the Southern one goes from Central China to Western Asia based on the construction of oil and gas pipelines in the maritime region of the Indo-China Peninsula⁵.

Image 5. The New Silk Road and Maritime Route in 21 Century



Source: <https://japan-forward.com/can-china-keep-up-as-southeast-asia-diversifies-ties/> https://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html. Similar view in People's Tribune, Comprehensive Perspective of "Silk Road Economic Belt", January of 2013.

As a result, this new approach would link both sides of two main economic areas and those hinterland countries would establish a new Eurasian continental bridge and build many corridors such as China-Mongolia-Russia, Central China, Asia-South-Asia and China-Indochina, which will accomplish the goal of building a cooperative platform by joining link cities along this Road so that in the future will form a big economic, business and industrial infrastructure.

⁵ See in the official document "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road" published by National Development and Reform Commission, March of 2015. http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201503/t20150330_669367.html. Similar view in People's Tribune, Comprehensive Perspective of "Silk Road Economic Belt", January of 2013.

Comparing the Silk Road along different periods, it clearly shows that the new Economic Belt covers the same areas of the ancient routes on which is geographically and culturally based.

In terms of function, all of the Silk Roads share the same goals by promoting the exchange of commodities and trade plus the integration of East and West. Both, the Han Dynasty and the Ming Dynasty developed the silk road with the purpose of claiming its role as the *Middle Kingdom* by spreading China's successful products. The One Belt One Road project today shows Xi Jinping's determination to take advantage of the external resources and the potential of Central Asia, Russia and European Union to solve China's domestic social issues.

However, the official document explains in detail the strategy in which connectivity and trade cooperation are underlined and highlights the construction of infrastructures in the cities along the routes. Not only the planification would be considered but also a common building standard for all the international traffic facilities planned. The strategy stresses the suppression of commercial and investment barriers, for example, in ways of developing a bilateral cooperation in certification, accreditation and statistical information, or by pushing the implementation of *Trade Organization Agreement on Trade Facilitation*. Mutual investment is especially another point of interest in the strategy. As for an economic basis supporting the implementation of the strategy, financial integration is a key element. The mutual cooperation would mainly focus on building a currency stability system, an investment financing system and credit information system in Asia.

To carry out this initiative, China has its own plans. In the preliminary stage it would highly rely on the statements of the President and Prime Minister during their official visits to third countries for the interpretation and explanation of their agenda. The, it will be time to set up a cooperation framework when the majority has reached a consensus about the Initiative. On the basis of the framework, China would design various projects in economic areas and improve supported policies while running projects with cooperating countries. Furthermore, taking advantage of the platforms such as international Summits, forums and expositions will also be established to accomplish the achievements as planned.

There are countries that have also adopted their own strategies similar to Chinese Silk Road

3. Similar strategies in other countries

Similarly, there are countries that have also adopted their own strategies similar to Chinese Silk Road. For example, Japan developed the strategy of Eurasian Diplomacy since 1997 which later was called the Silk Road Diplomacy; The United States had plans of New Silk Road and the strategy of a North-South Corridor, and finally, Russia once planed the North South Transport Corridor in Central Asia to promote Eurasian integration.

3.1. Eurasian Diplomacy by Japan

In 1997 the former Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto announced an initiative of a new Japanese Eurasian Diplomacy towards the Eurasia continent in taking into account the Western policy circles. Later, this Diplomacy was called the Silk Road Diplomacy with the goal of expanding Tokyo's influential perspective from the Pacific. However, Hashimoto recognized that the increasingly scarce natural resources of petroleum and natural gas would affect the world energy supplies. As a country lacking oil and gas, it would only benefit Japan's economy to take an active role in the regional economic activities based on the Pacific area's large potential markets.

Furthermore, Japan would build its own route of economic development in the Eurasian area which is different from the Europe-Asia bridge. Moreover, Eurasian countries would consider the development of Japan as a model role of non-western modernization and Japan as an industrial powerhouse that could bring new changes to this area (Hickok, 2000, pp. 17-39). To carry out the strategy, Japan's Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi toured the region in 1997 and presented Hashimoto's idea of the new Silk Road Diplomacy. Specifically, the main method was to offer a development plan that would help those countries situated along the Silk Road by improving their infrastructure facilities such as highways, railways and power distribution systems. Since 2004, Japan established the system of "Central Asia with Japan" where the country leader a political dialogue including economic, commercial cooperation and cultural exchange with these countries.

It might be concluded that the emphasis of Japan's policy focused especially on energy cooperation because of the country's own economic realities. However, the result was not as successful as expected and it was eventually shelved by the Japanese government. Due to its economic stagnation at that time, Japan eagerly sought support from Central Asian countries, but this policy was not successful. Furthermore, Japan is geographically separated from both mainland Asia and the Caucasus and China lying just in the middle means a handicap to their relationship. Additionally, it is hard to say that Japan really carried out an independent foreign policy because of the strong influence of American's foreign policy on Japan's decision-making processes. In 2005, when the "Andijan Riots" in Uzbekistan happened, the relation between the United States and Uzbekistan deteriorated, which led to the council of the foreign minister to postpone the strategy of "Central Asia with Japan", which shows clearly that Japan's foreign policy making was deeply influenced by American foreign policy: all this made more difficult to achieve the implementation of a new Silk Road Diplomacy.

The geopolitics of the Eurasian region have always been a major issue for the United States

3.2. New Silk Road Strategy by USA

The geopolitics of the Eurasian region have always been a major issue for the United States. Early in 1999, the American Congress published a *Silk Road Strategy Act* that aimed to refresh the Ancient Silk Road through countries in the Eurasian continent by supporting the economic and political independence of Central Asia and South Caucasus (House, 1999, pp. 1-5). Hence, the United States devoted itself to foster the economy and democratic political systems within those Central Asian countries. Unfortunately, the act was never passed by the Senate⁶.

When Bush became the President of the United States, he paid great attention to oil and gas pipelines in the Caspian Sea, considering it a mayor issue for America's national interests. In 2005, Frederick Starr proposed a strategy based on promoting a Greater Central Asia Partnership with Afghanistan and its neighbors (Starr, 2005) in which Afghanistan's role as the foothold to build a multilateral system of politics, economy and security for regional development and democratic reforms was emphasized. In this sense, binding with the Central Asian countries reflected indirectly the United States' concerns on energy resources⁷.

6 See also the law: The Silk Road Strategy Act. 1999. In 106th Congress, 1st Session (pp. 1-5).

7 In his article, Frederick explains the definition of Greater Central Asia that is the use of the "Greater Central Asia" of United States is trying to get rid of the narrow definition of Soviet Union about this region. Sinkiang and Afghanistan, as same as the former five countries of Soviet Union, have become an indispensable part of this region in terms of culture. The word of "Greater Central Asia" is in accordance with the reality and accepts the truth that the scope of Central has a wider range. Available in the website: https://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/SilkRoadPapers/2005_starr_a-greater-central-asia-partnership.pdf

In this sense, the Greater Central Asia strategy focused on trade to help Central Asian countries to reduce trade barriers in short term and carrying out the transportation protocol of open borders to establish economic and commercial cooperation among each other. From a global perspective, it would strengthen both the economic relations of five Central Asian countries with their neighbors and the connection with the global economic market and consequently achieve the goal of regional economic integration in Central Asia.

Moreover, the American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton once spoke of the *New Silk Road strategy* during her participation in the 2nd US-India Strategic Dialogue. She pointed out that the strategy was a long-term vision of an international economic and transit network that would link Central and South Asia with Afghanistan at its heart. This network would allow Afghanistan to attract new sources of foreign private-sector investment and connect to a global market, while generating new resources, markets, and investment opportunities for the entire region.⁸

The new strategy was implemented through the international assistance of infrastructure in local countries, while promoting the strategic objective of energy down to south and product up to north. At the ministerial conference about the New Silk Road held in Tokyo in 2012, the United States proposed the presence of Japan in the new strategy, which proved America's concern. It is not difficult to understand that the New Silk Road strategy has been pushed around Afghanistan and its neighbors because the United States were once involved in war affairs. However, these goals caused political interferences with Iran and proved to be a strong economic and security burden.

The increasing development of India's economic power has re-appealed the North-South Transportation Corridor in recent years

3.3. North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC) by Russia

The plan of a North-South Transport Corridor was put forward by Russia, India and Iran in December 2000 after signing an agreement with the purpose of promoting transportation cooperation with each other. It aimed to build a transportation route from South Asia running through Central Asia, Caucasus and Russia and finally reaching Europe⁹. Once finished, the project would dramatically reduce transportation cost from India to Europe. However, this plan moved forward slowly after the signature of the agreement due to the insufficient capital support and political divergences among member states. In particular, religious issues and political instability plus the nuclear issue in Iran, which was considered the core country of this plan, made the project fail¹⁰.

The increasing development of India's economic power has re-appealed the North-South Transportation Corridor in recent years. In 2014, the Indian government published a *Dry Run Report of INSTC (International North South Transportation Corridor)* in which it described specifically plans with the countries involved in the future route¹¹. But the transportation route scheme was still blocked by unstable political factors of those countries, for instance, the long-lasting historical conflict between India and Pakistan.

8 In the official website of U.S department of State says the objectives of the New Silk Road strategy, available at: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/09/173765.htm>

9 To get more information in the official website of NSTC: http://www.instc-org.ir/Pages/Home_Page.aspx. Also available the document of the signed Agreement: <http://www.instc-org.ir/Documents%20Archive/Agreement/Agreement.pdf>

10 From the "event" part of the official website, it has shown that since the proposal of the plan, the member states had organized various meetings between 2000 and 2006, then they didn't reorganize the meetings until 2013. We know that in 2006 the Security Council prohibited strictly the Nuclear project of Iran.

11 The report is available in: http://commerce.nic.in/publications/INSTC_Dry_run_report_Final.pdf

Image 6. The Route of North - South Transportation Corridor of Russia



Source: <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2018/11/20/1880263/russia-to-open-3bln-credit-line-for-north-south-corridor-iranian-minister>

4. China's ambition through One Belt One Road

The so-called “*Eurasia integration*” proposed by the Chinese government is extremely similar to Russia’s “*Eurasia Economic Union*”.¹² However, it is clear that the initiative demonstrates the aim of upgrading the economic integration including exchange of trade, services, capital and labor forces within Eurasian countries based essentially on a common cultural origin.¹³ Otherwise, China’s proposal aims to link low- income countries located in the South China Sea with major developed countries in Europe.

4.1. Soft power and China’s Dream

The concept of *soft power* proposed by Joseph Samuel Nye refers to the culture, political values and foreign policy that most countries have taken on actively to promote national development. However, it is true that although China has gained enormous economic success after the *Opening and Reform*, it still falls behind in regional cultural and value influence. Therefore, *China*

¹² In 2011, Russian president Putin spoke of “Eurasia Union” of former Soviet republics in the light of European Union. It aims to the liberal circulation of product, service, capital and labor, finally builds a uniform market similar with European Union.

¹³ The official document speaks of economic and cultural exchange, “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” published by National Development and Reform Commission, March of 2015.

Dream became one of the most important concepts for the Nation under Xi Jinping's presidency and it represents a great modernization of China's values.

The Chinese *Silk Road Economic Belt* is seen as a kind of strategy to push the soft power (Schambaugh, 2015) because it is built on the ancient silk road of the Han Dynasty. From the historical perspective, China during a more open period boasted a plentiful economic and cultural exchange with Eurasian countries with valuable products such as tea or silk under the Han Dynasty. Through such type of Ancient Silk Road, each country built emotional ties based on trade (Yinsheng, 2014).

So, the new Silk road calls for the period when friendly relationships were built between Eurasian countries and economic and financial cooperation were established at a high level. Relying on this new Silk Road, on the one hand, China could enhance economic exchanges with Eurasian countries, and on the other hand, strengthen non-governmental ties with them so that China Dream will be achieved step by step in future.

China is the world's biggest energy consumer and has kept growing for many years in a row

4.2. Go West diplomatic strategies

Watching China's role in the international stage, it can be noticed that is currently surrounded by a series of factors. For example, the relations with North Korea in the context of nuclear issues contrast to the period of 1950s; the controversy of Diaoyu Island with Japan and conflict of Huangyan Island in South China Sea with Philippines. To avoid more direct conflicts with neighboring countries, China has to instantly take measures and the "Go West" (Chinese: 西进) strategy is one of them according to academic circles. The concept was mentioned by Chinese scholar Wang Jisi and combines China's *West Development* strategy extending to the Western countries (Jisi, 2012).

The great strategy of the Silk Road Economic Belt, which seeks economic cooperation with countries of Eurasian continent, is according with the "Go West" strategy, therefore, a worthy option for the Chinese foreign diplomacy (Jiangguo, 2014).

4.3. Economic Interest and Energy Security

With the fast pace of economic development, the rise of consumption the need of resources, especially energy resource, are rising dramatically¹⁴. China is the world's biggest energy consumer and has kept growing for many years in a row¹⁵. Therefore, securing energy supply is a priority to assure China's sustainable development. Besides the existing sea routes of energy import supply, China also considers energy imports through alternative West continental routes in order to set extra channels. The Eurasian countries typically have great energy resources so China could take advantage of the economic and trade cooperation through the Silk Road Economic Belt to gain more suppliers¹⁶.

14 Energy Use per Capita from 1996 to 2010, World Bank. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.USE.PCAP.KG.OE> , <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.USE.PCAP.KG.OE/countries/IW-CN?display=graph>

15 See the *BP Annual Report of World Energy 2015*.

16 In the article "Silk Road Economic Belt of Energy: The Highlights of Energy Cooperation in the Silk Road Economic Belt". China Petroleum Enterprise, October of 2013, it says that Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan is the largest country in production of petroleum in Central Asia, Turkmenistan is abundant of natural gas.

In addition, there are few controversies between China and Eurasian countries on territory so that both countries would focus simply on economic cooperation. Considering those two aspects, the *Silk Road Economic Belt* is counted as an imperative and viable plan¹⁷.

From the other side, China has currently faced a slowdown in economic growth recently due to re-building of its industrial structures. In 2015 the GDP growth was 6.9%, which was under 7% for the first time in 25 years. In order to keep a fast pace of economic development, China would explore more opportunities of national economic cooperation or private investment with other countries. Central Asian countries are mainly developing economies in need of foreign investment to create income and jobs.

5. Approaches to Eurasia Integration through the Silk Road Economic Belt

In March 2015, the Chinese government published an official document that highlighted five cooperation priorities: policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bond. Depending on these general priorities combined with the current foreign policies, three main approaches can be concluded to promote Eurasia Integration. The circulation of products and the connectivity with Eurasia is based on the fundamental infrastructure network connecting all sub-regions. Therefore, the first step that should be taken is the construction of railways or cross-country roads, which is called the high-speed railway diplomacy (Bo, 2013).

In effect, China's high-speed railway network has developed rapidly in recent years over the Chinese mainland and boast successful design, mature technology and thus, rich experience in the construction of such networks. Based on the development, China has started cooperation in this field with Thailand, India, Indonesia and Russia under the foreign diplomacy of *High-speed railway* by the Prime Minister Li Keqiang. Otherwise, the joint program of railway construction with Russia has the stable financial support from Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank¹⁸. The reality is that there are so many Central Asian countries that lack of infrastructure along the Silk Road Economic Belt from China to Europe so that China could help them to build the cross-country roads and railway networks and consequently contribute to offer more job opportunities for the native labor forces with the goal of reaching a cooperation (Zhihong, 2015).

Furthermore, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization since its foundation in 2001 has expanded its cooperation projects from national security to economy¹⁹. The SCO is composed of six member states (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), five

In March 2015, the Chinese government published an official document that highlighted five cooperation priorities

17 See the report of People. Com "National Bureau of Energy of PRC: International Energy Cooperation is an important context of Silk Road Economic Belt", March, 2013. <http://energy.people.com.cn/n/2014/0320/c71661-24692722.html>

18 In October of 2014, China and Russia signed a memorandum of cooperation in high-speed railway, promoting the establishment of the Eurasian high-speed corridor from Peking to Moscow, preferring the construction of railway from Kashan to Moscow. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Wang Yi mentioned the "sufficient financial support of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank" on the Press Conference of the 3rd Session of the 12th National People's Congress, 8 March, 2015. Also see "the obvious progress of financing of Silk Road Economic Belt" in the speech of spokesman of Commerce Ministry, Xinhua News Agency, January 6th, 2016.

19 In 2003, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan signed together The Platform of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation between Member States of SCO, confirming the expansion of cooperation in short term, middle term and long term respectively.

observer states (Mongolia, Pakistan, India, Iran and Afghanistan), three dialogue partners (The Republic of Belarus, Turkey and Sri Lanka), all of them located around the *Silk Road Economic Belt*, which makes cooperation easier. The main goal of SCO is cooperation in terms of security that could create a good environment for further cooperation and to assure the building on infrastructures that allow the transportation of products through the Silk Road.

When it comes to the specific economic cooperation, the platform of electronic commerce was initiated by SCO in 2005 and began investing in those countries, establishing a system of fund raising and financial services. It would be a great potential of economic development for Eurasian countries to couple logistics with electronic commerce. On the other side, China proposed a policy of settlement in local currency and in 2003 China and Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement on these terms and then in 2004, China signed the agreement with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (Jiaka, 2015). This will bring more convenience for economic cooperation on the Silk Road.

Last but not least, the inter-governmental support emphasizes the cooperation with the Eurasia Economic Union of Russia. Russia has been involved in Central Asian affairs much earlier than China. In this regard, it once planned its own *Eurasia Economic Union* strategy towards Eurasia. Therefore, China has to “get permission” of Russia if it wants to achieve its goal in Eurasian areas in accordance with the relevant position of Russia in Central Asia (Hong, Zh., 2015). In addition, Russia has more experience in dealing with Eurasian affairs and China should learn lessons from it, finding better ways to cooperate with Russia. In 2015, China and Russia issued a statement of joint cooperation between *Silk Road Economic Belt* and *Eurasian Economic Union*, which confirmed their mutual support in Eurasia integration issues. That means the building of a mutual support from the governments as both countries have the same interests in Eurasian region.

The Green Silk Road conveys two main ideas: building an ecological civilization and a green development scheme based on the Silk Road

5.1. The evolution of Silk Road with new contents in recent years

Four years after the initiative of the Silk Road in 2013, China's Ministry of Ecology and Environment published in 2017²⁰ the *One Belt One Road Ecological Environmental Protection Cooperation Plan*, which announced the goal of building a green, prosperous Road that embodies the friendship with countries along the line.

The Green Silk Road conveys two main ideas: building an ecological civilization and a green development scheme based on the Silk Road, which can be traced back from Hu Jintao's policy governance. The Report at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (2012) presented by Hu declared that “facing the severe situation of tightening resource constraints, serious environmental pollution, and degradation of the ecosystem, it is necessary to establish an ecological civilization concept that respects, conforms to, and protects nature, and puts the construction of ecological civilization in a prominent position”²¹. Therefore, Xi added more contents such as creation, coordination, opening and sharing related to both international and domestic realities.

20 See the Chinese version in the official web site of Ministry of Ecology and Environment of PRC: http://www.mee.gov.cn/gkml/hbb/bwj/201705/t20170516_414102.htm

21 See the Chinese version: http://www.wenming.cn/djw/gcsy/zywj/201305/t20130524_1248116.shtml

On the one hand, countries along the Silk Road such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Mongolia face environmental problems such as wildfires, land erosion and desertification, which could restrain their economic development. As a matter of fact, the rational exploitation and use of new energy resources (natural gas) in Central Asia may speed the process of agricultural modernization with the purpose of improving the overall ecological environment of Central Asia.

In addition, because of climate change, the sustainable development is necessary for those countries that are already experiencing environmental problems. As the leading country in the initiative of Green Silk Road, China assumes the responsibility of offering support to these countries. For example, the joint declarations on climate change between China-India, China-Pakistan, China-Europe, China-U.S., and China-France were issued one after another. And China submitted the *Enhanced Actions on Climate Change: China's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions* to the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in which China pledged providing 20 billion yuan for developing countries in order to establish a climate change Fund of South-South cooperation²². Later in 2015, Xi Jinping attended the Paris Conference on Climate Change and proposed that the Paris Agreement should strengthen the global response to climate change after 2020. In Leaders' Summit on Climate 2021, Xi officially announced that China would strive to achieve carbon peaks by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2060²³.

On the other hand, green development, which requires the support of a green economy, low-carbon economy and circular economy to power development, pays more attention to production methods with high technology contents, low resource consumption and less environmental pollution. In China's current energy structure, coal still occupies a large share of China's energy consumption that accounts for 64% in 2015. Compared to 74% in 2005, there has been a significant decline in 10 years. However, the use of other fossil fuels has increased (natural gas increased by 4.8%, and oil increased by 1.5%). Renewable energy has increased by 20.9% in 2015. Among non-fossil energy sources, solar energy has had the fastest growth (+69.7%), followed by nuclear energy (+28.9%) and wind energy (+15.8%). China has surpassed Germany and the United States to become the world's largest solar power generation country. Just in ten years (2005-2015), China's share of renewable energy in the global total has increased from 2% to the current 17%.

Therefore, no matter if the goal is helping regional economic development and the transformation of economic structure or fostering the transformation of China's energy structure, the government still has to consolidate the Green Silk Road strategy.

Based on scientific and technological development, president Xi Jinping put forward another "Digital Silk Road of 21st century" in 2017 that promotes connections between big data, cloud computing and smart cities, based on digital economy, IA, nanotechnology and quantum computing. The Digital Silk Road is associated with the Green Silk Road in terms of green and sustainable development and the Chinese government would like to find new informatization incentive to stress economic development.

President Xi Jinping put forward another "Digital Silk Road of 21st century" in 2017 that promotes connections between big data, cloud computing and smart cities

22 See the Chinese official document: http://www.china.org.cn/environment/2015-06/30/content_35950951.htm

23 See the Chinese Speech by Xi Jinping: <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1697752415609902504&wfr=spider&for=pc>

Furthermore, China set the Digital Belt and Road Program (DBAR)²⁴ in 2017 that focuses on research in food safety, climate and environment change, coastal areas and ocean environment, natural hazards, city and infrastructure and water resource and water security among joint countries.

It is well-known that the global informatization wave has gone through three stages. The first stage is the era of stand-alone information processing (from the 1950s to the mid-1980s), such as IBM's first-generation computers and microcomputer workstations, focusing on the information processing capabilities of a stand-alone computer; the second stage is the Internet era (beginning in the late 1980s), the core key point is the interaction and interconnection of information; the third stage is the current era of the Internet of Things, with the development of artificial intelligence, data acquisition and the digitization of people and things. The digitization of the Internet of Things covers the fields of human-computer interaction, machine-machine interaction, etc., and constitutes the core kinetic energy for the development of the digital economy (Wen, 2019).

According to the Internet Trends Report 2018²⁵, Internet users have exceeded more than half of the global population. In 2017, smartphone shipments did not increase for the first time. As the number of global smartphone users increases, it is becoming more and more difficult to accelerate the growth rate. The growth rate of Internet users in 2017 was 7%, which was lower than 12% in 2016. American adults spent 5.9 hours on digital media every day, which was higher than the 5.6 hours in the previous year. Among them, about 3.3 hours are consumed in mobile phones, which is an important reason for the overall growth of digital media consumption.

The new concept of Internet of things (IoT) is appraised by the Chinese government and China has turned into the biggest market of IoT. According to the Internet of Things statistics released by the operator Worldnet in July 2017, the scale of China's Internet of Things market reached 750 billion yuan in 2015 and 930 billion yuan in 2016. Among them, the growth rate of wireless interconnection has accelerated significantly. It is estimated that by 2020, the scale of China's Internet of Things industry will exceed 1.5 trillion yuan.

In addition, the development of artificial intelligence is closely related to big data and the IoT is the source of both big data and artificial intelligence. Hence, the improvement of social services and the achievement of breakthrough development in the manufacturing industry would be shown through artificial intelligence applied to IoT. For example, the IoT provides a wide range of training scenarios for the development of AI in the fields of medical care, manufacturing, agriculture, public utilities, retail, hotel and residential construction, which is beneficial to almost all offline industries.

Except the e-commerce, the Digital Silk Road is also designed to support the joint anti-terrorism service, natural disaster emergency service and ecological environment protection service (Yunqiang, 2015). Specifically, terrorist activities in the international sphere are a public hazard to all mankind and seriously threaten people's lives, property safety and social order. Preventing and fighting violent terrorist activities is an important national security task for countries along the Silk Road. Terrorist activities feature cross-border organization, gradual expansion of attacks, tight organization, and various means of committing crimes. Therefore, based on the information highways and big data mining and analysis technology, the joint countries would accurately and timely grasp the possible target information of terrorist attacks, terrorist organi-

The Digital Silk Road is also designed to support the joint anti-terrorism service, natural disaster emergency service and ecological environment protection service

²⁴ More information in the official website: <http://www.dbeltroad.org/>

²⁵ Meeker & Wu (2018). Internet trends 2018.

zation personnel and activity information, topography and landforms, traffic facilities, terrorist flight and gathering information on hospitals, firefighting, public security, etc.

The cooperation in natural disaster emergency would collect and integrate historical records of natural disaster data, as well as data on geological environment, geographical conditions, meteorology and hydrology, and surface scanning that may cause natural disasters. Satellite navigation and IoT allow real-time monitoring of the status of hidden hot points of major natural disasters, as well as natural disaster early warning and prediction, disaster loss assessment, and post-disaster reconstruction planning based on resource and environmental carrying capacity analysis.

In the ecological environment area, the Digital Silk Road could integrate ecological environment monitoring data (ecosystem, surface water, air quality, greenhouse gases, etc.), especially cross-border river water quality monitoring data, adjacent-areas atmospheric environment monitoring data, as well as ecological environment quality assessment in order to support the evaluation of the status quo of the ecological environment quality and the study of its evolution, the migration and diffusion of pollutants, and formulate regional ecological environmental protection measures.

6. Conclusion

The Silk Road Economic Belt is one of the great strategies led by Chinese president Xi Jinping. From the construction of the railway to the exchange of university students, China has steadily carried out a step-by-step program since it was introduced in 2013. From the perspective of Eurasian integration, the building of infrastructure will contribute to increase the standards of living of the people along the Economic belt; the logistics and products exchanges will help countries with low income to earn more profits; the financial cooperation will offer more opportunities not only for national states but also for its populations.

In recent years, the new contents of Silk Road show the above-mentioned concepts of shared benefits by Xi Jinping. The shared ecological concept displays Xi's idea of a human community with a common future regarding climate change. The joint standard set by the Silk Road would improve the ecological programs more effectively. In 2018, the China Green Finance Committee and the City of London jointly initiated the Green Investment Principle for the Belt and Road (Green Investment Principle for the Belt and Road) in order to promote low-carbon investment projects in these countries. Finally, the shared technological and financial tools combined with AI and IoT would offer a multi-dimensional support for the One Belt One Road. Therefore, China could take advantage of the building of the Silk Road to accomplish its national goals, for instance, proving itself as a non-threatening, rising Great power, the belief of building a common destiny and China's Dream of Chinese National Great Rejuvenation.

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